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Grimoire



DAVID McSLANE



This "magic book" compiles the creative efforts of writers, poets, and artists from the La Salle student community. It contains ideas and reflections on the various aspects of life: from the happiness of love to the disappointment of rejection, and from the innocence of youth to the wisdom of old age. (I proudly dedicate this 1988 Grimoire to one of the oldest and, at the same time, youngest friends I have the pleasure of knowing. This one is for you, Jack.)

Much thanks to Cherry, our publishing representative, to Dr. Lang, who allowed me to invade the printmaking files, but most especially to Dr. Lautz, who got the staff's butts moving when we needed it.

Aspiring artists and writers are encouraged to "give us your best" creative efforts for next year's edition of Grimoire.

Enjoy,
David P. McShane,
Editor

THE 1988 GRIMOIRE

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[illegible]

MISS LILY

Every child
in Queen of the Universe Parochial School
feared her,
especially her paddle,
though no one ever saw it.
Once she said
she liked teaching
second grade
because it was the only class,
other than first,
where the boys weren't taller than she.
But, she wasn't small
in those brown and black suits
with the little bits of blouse
peeking through.
All year I counted only three:
one with lace,
one of ruffles, and
one-which she didn't wear too much-
draped a satin bow
over her jacket.

"Bold Articles",
she termed all boys;
We were her "Lady Janes",
who must always have
slanted and swirly penmanship
and never chew gum.

My mother, who also had her
when she was in second grade,
told me Miss Lily
must be near eighty years old by now.
I corrected her.
For Miss Lily told us her real age.
She's one hundred and fifty-one.

But what I never told my mother,
Who didn't believe in sugar or sweets
was that every lunch time
Miss Lily appeared at my desk.
"What! Forgot your dessert again?"
She'd grumble as if I forgot
to memorize my catechism question.
She'd go to her large pocketbook,
take a cupcake, brownie, or cookie
and set it on my desk
letting me know that
it was done not to be kind,
but rather, because
she was on a diet.

ROUTINE

Every morning I used to wake
and find myself overpowered
by you, your leg thrown
over my hip as if frozen
while climbing a fence
in your sleep.

I still wake with expectations.
The strange calls of a bird
at sunrise send me rushing
outside barefoot in hope
of finding the garden flapping
with ostriches and flamingoes,
picking at the pumpkins and
radishes we planted,
grown gargantuan in your absence.

This morning it was a pheasant
prowling near the gate,
dragging a languid tail

As I opened the door it flew away.

—Patrick Kelly



—Steve Sabo

d
rip
drop
dripdrop
the cold, wet
splash of the
sparkling raindrop
falls on my nose
dribbles down
my cheek

—eak

TEARBANKS

torrents of tears
overflowed my memory banks
and caused a flood
of confusion
remembrances were carried
 swiftly downstream
they were denied the ability
to meander along the
 pathway of the senses
unable to be recalled completely
overwhelmed by the turbulences of
 the roaring rapids.
hours passed
as the flooded river subsided
debris was left along the banks
to be collected and sorted
tangible evidence of what existed
 upstream
forever lost in an autumn's rain.

—*eak*

Infection —
(a love poem)

'Twas infected in heart when we kissed;
'Twas infected in tears o'er times we missed;
'Twas infected too in throat and tongue,
And through viral infection is this tale sung.

I kissed you e're my throat did close,
And feared you'd share the pain.
You said in truth you did not mind;
I kissed you once again.

And then you bore my fruits of ill;
Alas my germs in you did spill.
My heart knew guilt, and oh I fretted;
Still you said you'd not regret it.

So I kissed you gently still
For your love was appreciated,
But when our lips met, could I know
Your germs reciprocated?

And now I lay in bed once more;
My mouth is sore and greened;
Worst of all, sweet love of mine;
We both are quarantined.

Know, dear heart, our love may grow
And be more than ethereal;
But would that our offspring
Had been somewhat less bacterial!

Aye, absence makes the heart grow fonder,
But late this night I sit and wonder;
If love's obsessed to charm and please,
When has it time for such disease?

—*Michael Ian Sheinbaum*

your ocean blue eyes
wash over me
warm sensation:
volcanic passion

—Margaret M. Stephan

Nasal Confusion

It was Chanel Number Five. I think.
Or no. It was Charlie or Georgio.
Or Opium. It was not Obsession.
Some kind of pasteurized whale blubber.
That is the essence: A pleasant stink.

The scent I don't miss. The girl sometimes.
A group of girls pass, as I watch happily.
But too old, too young, too fat for me.
Yet one, unknown, wears the memory.
Suddenly I'm back with her. Good times.

The scent seems to sweeten, asking me why.
Then, bitterly, another smell comes.
In subway steam I know the answer.
My question fades. I feel the depression.
I think perhaps it was obsession.

—Tim Moxey

THE SWEET SAVAGE PASSION OF LOVE'S FORBIDDEN FURY

The heavy mist surrounding the Hawkins' farmhouse clouded Florette's thoughts as she sat on the edge of her bed staring out the window. Dawn was approaching Gumplesley slowly, as if uncertain whether to appear, like a guest invited to a party out of her social class and as uncomfortable with the idea of attending as the host, who felt uncomfortably obligated to invite her. Florette stared blankly out the window, past the warm, nondescript bottle of window cleaner on the sill. Smoke from her cigarette slithered languidly toward the ceiling. Dirk was gone and she had an appointment with the periodontist who loathed her, and with Dirk gone, Florette's gums stood as much chance of survival as Ray Krock at a heifer convention.

As the mist outside the window cleared, Florette could see the rows of gold and green corn stretching toward the horizon, glistening with sparkles of dew in the sunlight. The morning was creeping silently across the sky like a gypsy wearing orange and blue and yellow flowing robes with large silver dangle earrings and a red and white bandanna on her head. She felt eminently, eternally sad. She stood and collected her dresses from the closet and put them in the open suitcase on the bed. A mosquito buzzed beside her ear, but she paid no attention.

Slipping two dainty size-four feet into her black pumps, Florette's thoughts were miles away with Dirk. The mosquito landed on her neck as she remembered their last night of panting passion, of hot sweaty monkey love when they vowed to be together again. The mosquito plunged its proboscis deep into Florette's neck, draining the life from her. She shuddered, feeling the sting, and hearing her mother's voice invade her private rendezvous.

"Flo," she shouted. "You up yet? Got cows ta milk before the periodontist." "Oui," Florette answered tearfully, holding a fist to her mouth, choking back a sob. She swatted the mosquito, and with a squish, tiny drops of blood splattered on the bare shoulder her tight black dress revealed. She sat beside the suitcase and the bed let out a groaning creak. Looking out the window at the clouds, like truffles hovering in the distance, she knew she would soon be in Paris, in Dirk's arms of granite, gazing woefully into his steel-gray eyes, resting her head on his massive hairless chest and pressing a sighing, heaving bosom into his rippling stomach.

Florette was distracted again by her father, Hank, trudging through the mire on his way to the barn. She wiped a tear from her cheek. Grabbing her purse, which went very tastefully with her shoes and dress, she closed the suitcase and hoisted it onto her shoulder by the strap. It was time to go, but she would leave no note nor provide any explanation. Her father wanted her only for work because her brother Pierre was lazy and mother was incapable of understanding anything since being abducted two

months earlier by an alien space ship on which she claims to have met and discussed current events with Elvis. The immediate publicity disrupted the mind of an otherwise lucid woman.

Walking carefully down the stairs, Florette could hear her mother praying before the Elvis shrine built to the specifications of the aliens in order to ensure the safe and imminent return of The King. Strains of "Love Me Tender" covered her footsteps.

Making her way from the house to the barn, Florette's six-inch spikes were no match for the unpaved trail often travelled by what appeared to be every horse in the county. Passing endless rows of corn, she stopped and collected her faculties, dropping the leaden bag and straightening her hair and the seams in her black stockings with the poise and dignity of a debutante caught in a Manhattan wind storm. Summoning her inner strength, she forged onward to the barn.

It was the kind of day when no one felt like working, least of all Florette. She noticed purple things hanging from the trees, some kind of yellow and red flowers bordering a field of grass, and soft summer breezes were wafting through her flimsy black dress, reminding her how wonderful it is to be alive. Once outside, she could not even bear to entertain the thought of staying on the farm any longer. She wanted to be in Paris on such a day and feel it up, give it a hug, put her tongue in its ear and give it a hickey, the giant kind that throbs for hours and turns purple and black and looks like a coagulation convention. It was a day that deserved to be squeezed and fondled.

It was a nice day, she thought as the smell of the barn engulfed her entire being. Her father was milking a cow.

"Grab a pitchfork," he said.

"Papa," Florette said dolefully. "Je dois parler avec toi."

"Well git the pitchfork. You kin work an' talk at the same time." She dropped the suitcase and daintily grasped the foreign object between thumb and forefinger.

"I want to leave."

"You always want to leave. Paris is beautiful this time of year." Hank began crooning the delightfully heartwarming but somehow sickeningly mournful "Paris in the Springtime," a hit made famous by Maurice Chevalier, but Florette could not imagine her father wearing a white chapeau. When he finally finished his rendition, she leaned down beside him, resting on the pitchfork handle.

"I am tres serious this time. I want to leave."

"We've gone over this before," he said as he unhanded the udders. "I don't understand."

"There is nothing to understand. I must leave. I don't belong here."

"Oh, that I understand. It was the other part I didn't git. You was talkin' too fast agin. I swear, yer accent

gits thicker ev'ry day."

"Don't you see father?" she shouted in frustration. "I am different than everyone else, n'est pas?"

"You ain't so different," he consoled her, gently kicking a cow chip across the barn. He sat her down on the stool beside the cow, comforting her. She covered her eyes with both hands. Hank gently prodded her arms toward the udders, but she resisted.

"You ain't so different from anybody else around here."

Florette screamed at him, "For God's sake Father, open your eyes! I am French! Look at me. I'm French!"

"Well take it easy. I said you ain't so different. I'm the first to admit that yer a little eccentric, dressing the way you do an' all."

"I want to get away from here," she whispered softly, wiping her eyes. "I am having, how you say, an identity crisis, no?"

"You'll be fine," he assured her, but he was unconvincing. She felt Dirk beckoning to her, and she picked up her bag and stepped back into the sunlight of freedom, leaving behind her the stench of dead hopes and forgotten dreams, going forward to her destiny, and as fate would have it, a large pile of manure. Undaunted, she continued, ignoring Hank's calls about the periodontal appointment which had taken so long to get. She walked up the dirt path to the highway, but she felt the oppression of her soul still upon her and began running, her arms aching from the suitcase. She ran past the chickens scattered about the pen, clucking their dismay (or their happiness, or their irritation at being made to run around all day like their late relatives. Either way, it is difficult to gage a chicken's emotional state when they only make one kind of clucking sound, and Florette cared little for them since her own problems weighed so heavily upon her frail frame.)

She tried to keep running when she finally reached the highway, but the morning was hotter than a snake's ass, which is what her father used to say, which she never quite understood, but found it far more colorful than "hotter 'an hell" which is what her brother frequently said. Florette stopped running and stood beside the road hoping to see a car.

Walking on, she heard a truck rumble behind her. Turning, she saw that it was Pierre's truck. She tried to run again, but her legs turned to rubber. The truck spun and dramatically stopped in front of her, trailing a cloud of dust which made her yearn for the better paved Parisian roads.

"Where ya' goin' honey?" Much to her dismay, the face thrust out the passenger window was Hoss "Bear" Flaubert, the one man she did not want to see. She had spent her life (since blossoming at puberty into a continental woman) avoiding Bear, and especially his cat, Madame Bovary. Bear smiled at her from the truck, showing the results of severe dental

neglect. It was not that Bear never brushed or flossed, but his dentist went berserk one day and gave him enough Novocain to numb his entire head, which is to say that Bear got a very small dose. The dentist was experimenting with what he called Dental Sculpture. (He was rumored to have flunked out of art school before completing medical school.) He attempted to turn Bear's mouth into a showcase of ersatz avante-garde statuettes. The result was something similar to Salvadore Dali's mind exploding into small manageable tooth-sized pieces. Bear was able to make some money off the novelty for a few days, but people soon tired of looking into his mouth for two dollars a peek, especially since Bear's choice of cuisine lent itself to things often considered less than haute.

"Kin I help ya with yer bag?" Bear asked, beaming. He climbed out of the truck with Pierre walking around the front. "I was workin' out back when I heard yer father yellin' for me. He said you was goin' to town. I guess yer excited about the periodontist, huh? He's in the same building as my dentist. I should probably go in fer a little polishin' job myself." Bear put the suitcase in the back of the truck and opened the door for Florette. Pierre seemed to have fallen asleep while leaning on the cab. When she looked inside, sitting on the front seat was Madame Bovary, who leapt onto Florette's head, wrestling her to the ground. Bear laughed as she struggled with the cat, chiding them both gently for being so playful.

Madame Bovary was a small, rust colored tabby which Bear used to help keep her father's chickens in line. Florette never did have a very good rapport with animals in general, and with Madame Bovary in particular. She even went as far once to report her to the animal authorities, which the cat seemed to know about. Nothing was ever done about the feline menace because she sensed that the investigator from the county office was up to no good and dealt with him accordingly. And somehow, the cat seemed to know that it was Florette who was responsible for her near demise.

"C'mon you two," Hoss chuckled, yanking the cat's claws from Florette's throat. "You two kin play in the truck."

"No, I vill sit in ze back," she said, scurrying to the rear of the pickup. Bear said okay and threw Madame Bovary in with her. They stared at each other across the small vastness of the truck. Determination and strong will had purchased Florette a one-way ticket on an express train that makes one stop, with one passenger. Destiny had punched and validated her ticket, and having come this far, the knowledge of Dirk's love kept her strong as the truck lurched forward toward the town and the periodontist, staring into the eyes of pure evil in the sunshine of a day that was meant for Florette and Dirk.

—Patrick Kelly



—Steve Sabo

God?

God if you exist
I think you better answer
I'm really getting pissed
With all this war and cancer

They say you are the Supreme Being
and blind faith is a must
Faith just seems an obscure thing
in which I cannot trust

Why should I be graced with riches
While others put their dead in ditches?

Are homeless people simply there
To measure me in my despair?

You put forth to create a world
filled with such delight
yet wealthy women with hair a'curled
turn up their nose at plight

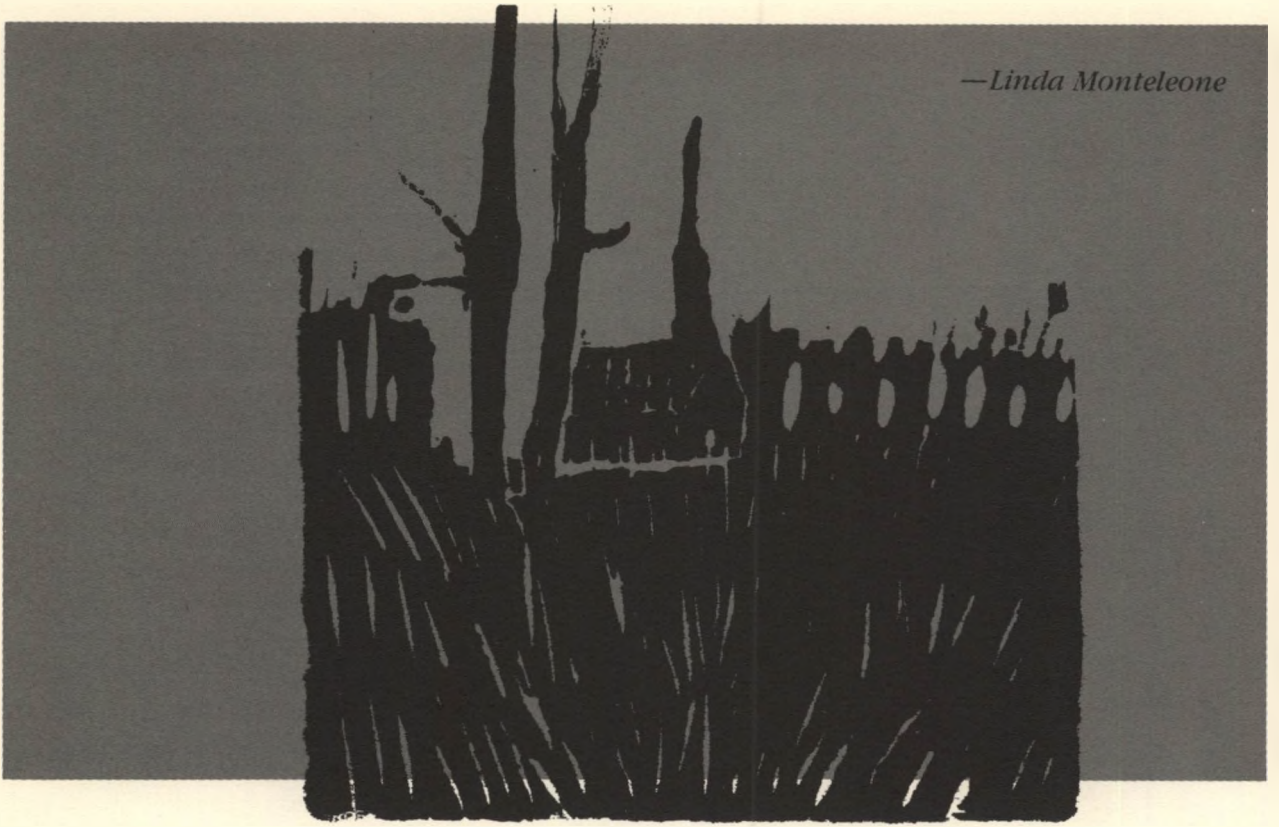
If good and evil balance Nature
How come you're the favored side
I'm told that Satan was your creature
How could you do that with pride

And if you condemned this angel to hell
was there evil before as well?

Discrepancies abound throughout
knowledge that is easy to doubt

So tell me God, are you a figment
of the imagination of every pigment
'Cause if you're not it seems to me
You'd better prove you've eyes that see.

—*Brian J. Cabill*



The White Room

I. Winter: A Consolation

I think that I shall never know
A thing more lovely than the snow
That softly falls upon the Winter grass
And makes my true love fall upon her ass.

II. Someone Next to Me

Here I like to be,
Where no one has the key,
Alone among my books
Where no one ever looks.
And here it's quiet and small,
No pictures on the wall
Of people that I know,
Though through my mind they go.
And here I have to stay,
When they have gone away,
And here I'd like to see
Someone next to me.

III. In Memoriam O.K.

To be and not to question: there's the rub;
While sitting in a classroom or a tub,
Poor pedants ponder problems ponderous;
But I would rather be inside the pub.

IV. Vinter: A Consolation

I think that I shall never find
A thing more lovely than red wine,
'Cept whiskey with a beer chaser
And some vodka to erase 'er.

V. A Pathetic Fallacy

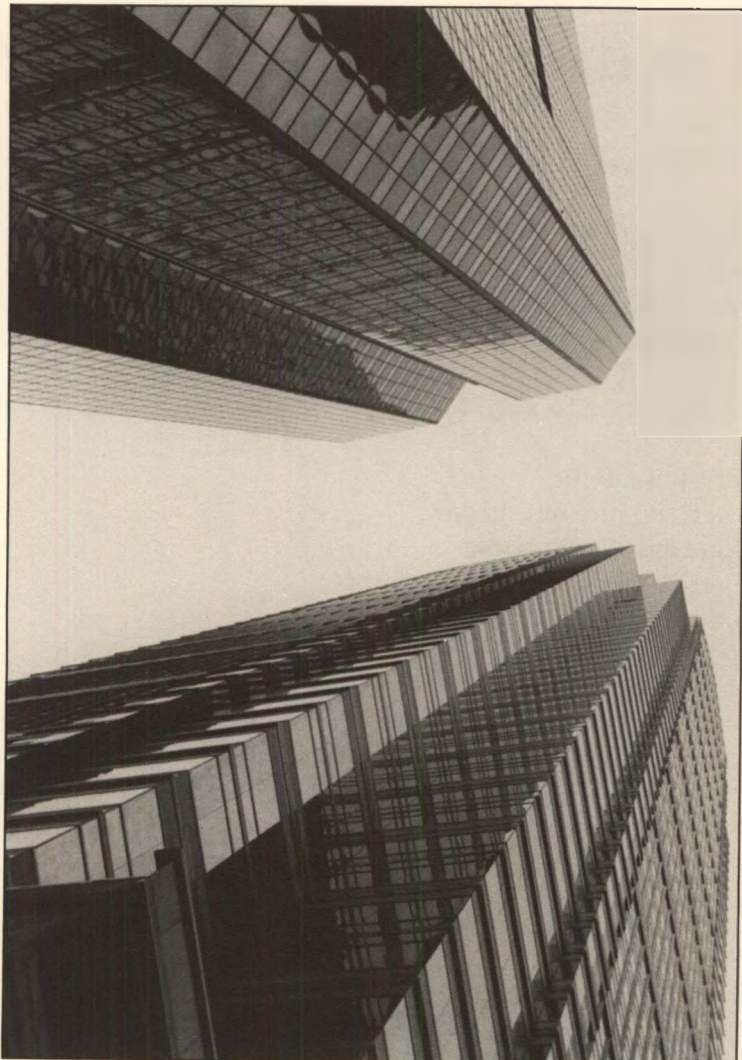
I
Must die
When I sleep
For Darkness creeps
Into my conscience
And the Moon broods o'er Gloom
And the mellow Wind breathes low
Outside my hollow room below
While blind dreams drown in cold black silence.
But, then I wake and think of you
And darkling ask if I can
Love anything again.
And the Moon above
The Streetlight Glares,
The Wind Flares,
And I
Lie.

Oppression

Technological
advances keep
the powerless
where “they belong”:

beneath our feet.

—*Margaret M. Stephan*



—*Jim Power*

It is raining.

Not the gentle splash of a spring shower, but a cold teem that pricks your skin like broken glass.

You are running down an alley. Solid cobbles seem to chuckle at your slipping feet. You fall, slide, rise, wobble back into motion.

Behind you two headlights diffract the air into a field of sparks. You feel their radiant tendrils glide along your spine, ripping at the bones.

They've found you. You don't know how. The move didn't help, the new name, the surgery. How far you've gone for a little peace, and now it seems as if they've been with you all the way.

The stones end in a wall, no exit. You could turn back, run at the car, but instead your back slides down the rockface so that you face seated the now-motionless beams.

Doors slam. Two figures silhouette.

One lights a match, the flame trailing upwards, cometlike, towards his cigarette. You see his eyes, their cold white glare, through steel rain.

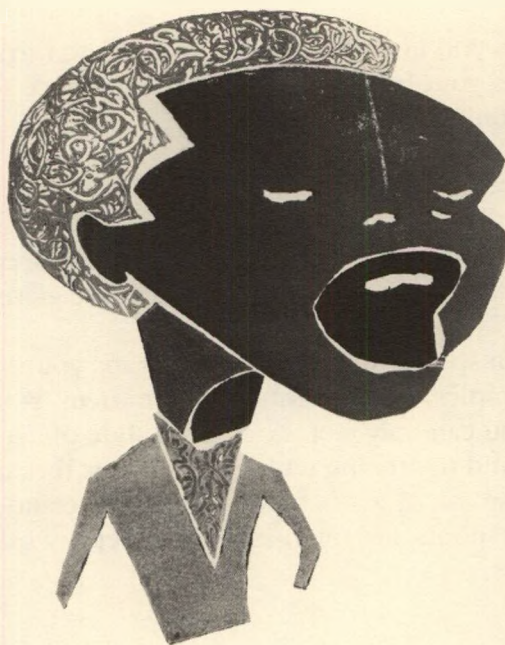
You cannot speak. Gulps of air still scrape your lungs, and your pulse pounds in your temples. No thoughts between them. You can only see the shadowy shapes. You can only feel the smooth slide of hands around your neck, the slow, languid tightening which closes your throat, which brings on darkness...the splash of warm blood on your face and neck, following shots, preceding shouts and the hurried footsteps of others who bring help, and more lights...

—Chris Thumann

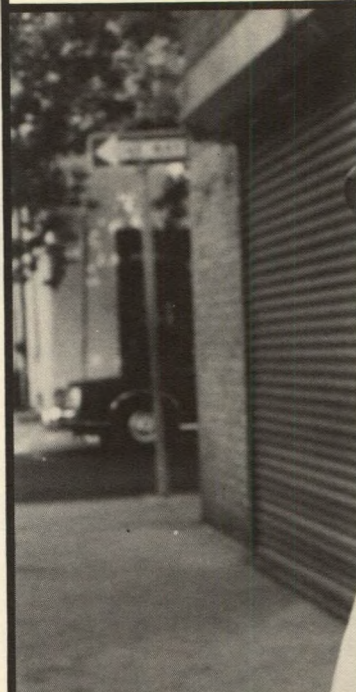


—Mike Costa

Waving Blades —*Frank P. Koziol*



acy Reardon



—*David Livewell*

—*Herman Cohen*

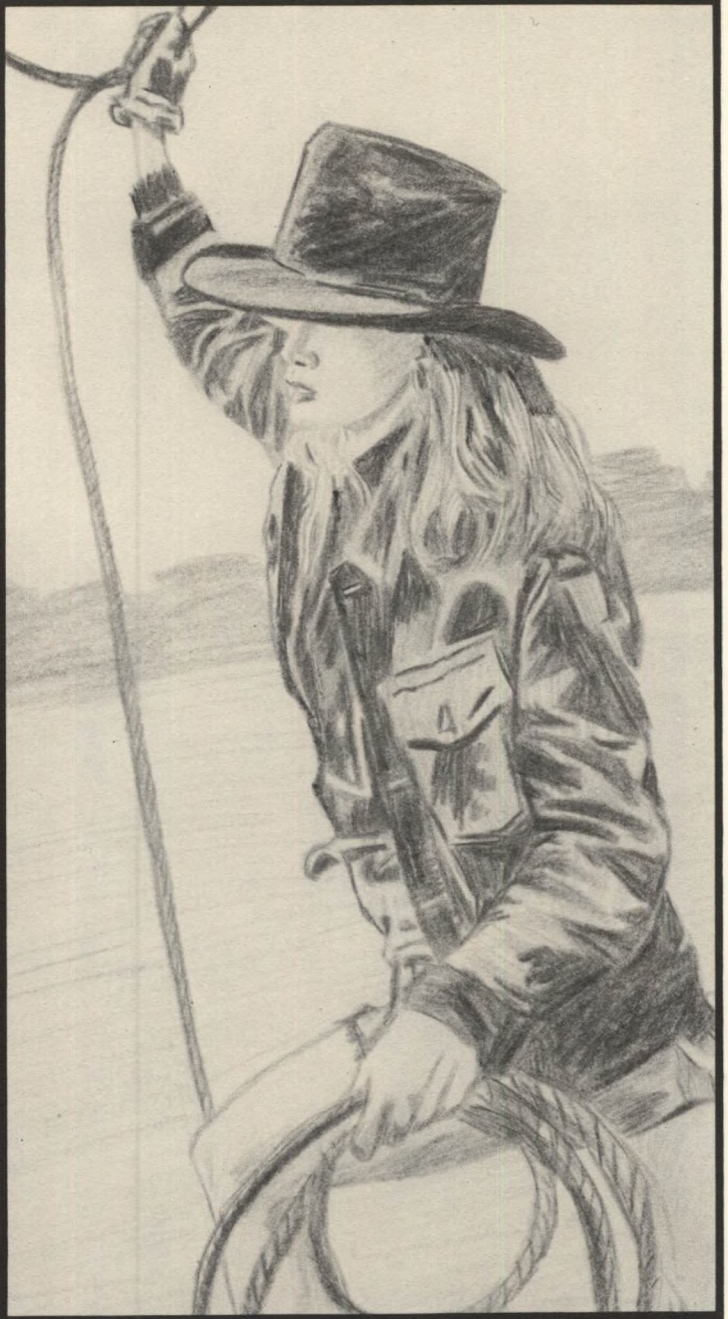


—*Jackie O'Rourke*



—*Monica Dicarlo*

—Pat Henry

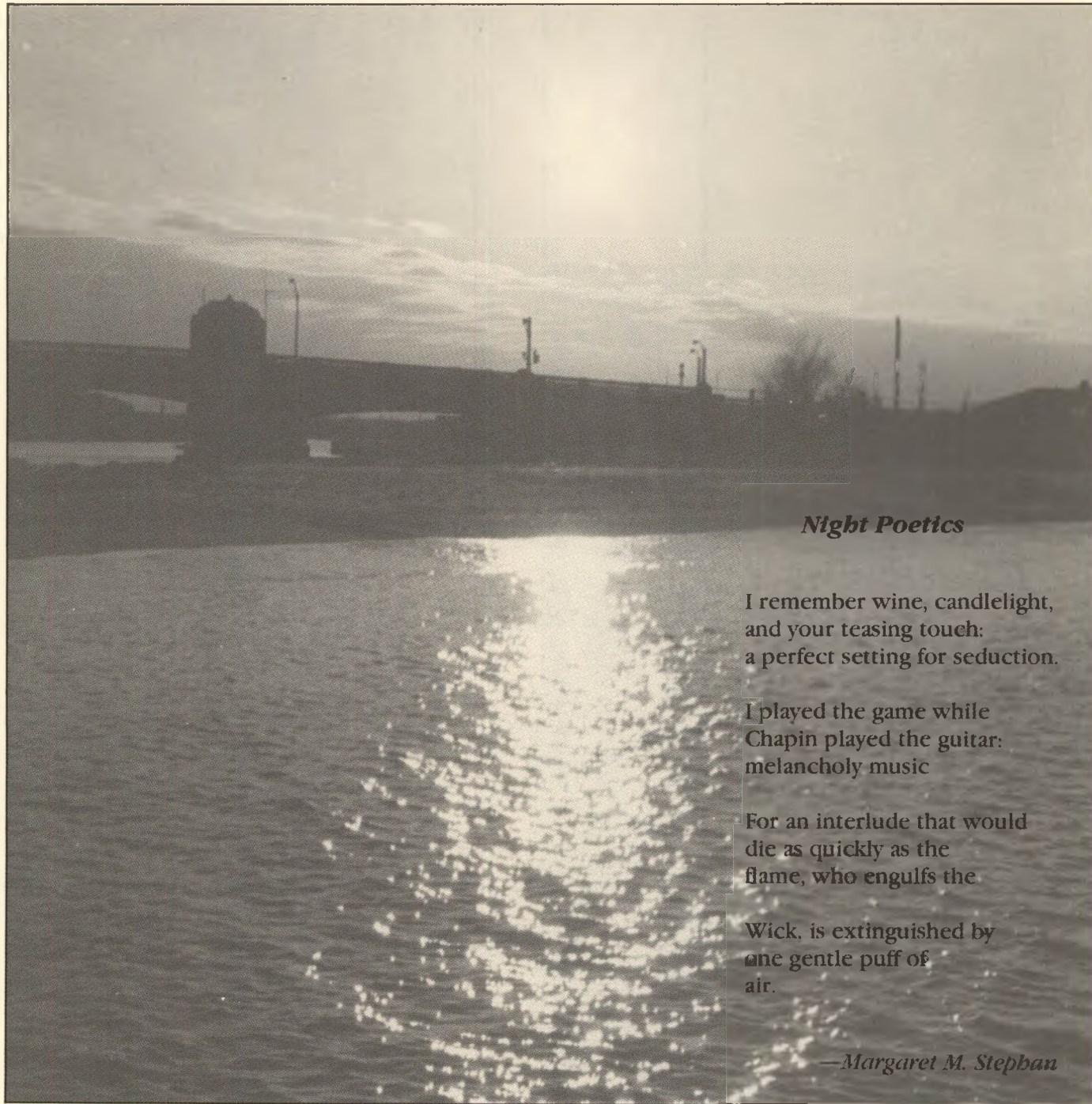


—Kelly Barten



—Nadia Pryszlak

—Marysa Van Patten



Night Poetics

I remember wine, candlelight,
and your teasing touch:
a perfect setting for seduction.

I played the game while
Chapin played the guitar:
melancholy music

For an interlude that would
die as quickly as the
flame, who engulfs the

Wick, is extinguished by
one gentle puff of
air.

—Margaret M. Stephan

OUR LADY OF STILLED LIFE

Dusk dissolves itself into the night sky
and the sunset light enflamed on her cheek
quenches itself in a violet wave.
She is left washed in the bluish moonlight
As the blessing of darkness wraps her in
sable veils of even kinder shadow,
enshrining her figure in muted light.
At the hour,
An ice-cold laser traps the stone virgin.
She stands-stripped-electric white and revealed,
her pale hand caught in a mea-culpa,
the eternal prayer of her exposure.
Ripping away drapes of shade, a glare
unmasks the face of dull, lifeless features
marred by a drip of stain across her lip.
Profaned, her beauty shines in brutal light

—Terri M. Burke



—Kim Kraus

Tenement

To my left, I hear the scrape
Of indecision from the closet next door—
Wire hangers on a pole
Daring the neighbor to find clothes
That not only match but fit.

I hear water run on the other side—
A jump and a cry—unwelcome cold spray
On the back of the other neighbor.

The click, zip, slide of locks
On the left. The easy turn of a knob
On the right. Two neighbors
Meet in the hallway. They speak.

Muffled voices are drowned by
The clock/radio from the next floor up.
You wake up to the sounds of Sinatra
telling how he did it.

I see you try to focus your eyes
To watch me tiptoe barefoot
Across hardwood floors.
I make my cup of coffee quietly.
You yawn, stretch, and fall back asleep.

I hear footsteps upstairs and a chair
Slides across a floor as my hand slides
The cover across your sleeping shoulder.
A still moment amidst chaos.

—Joanne Melinson

"Scoop Mouse"
(With apologies to the Collegian Editorial Staff)

S M
C O
O U
O S
P E

There's a mouse in the office.
It's no wonder.

One person has stockpiled ketchup
(I suppose in the event of a nuclear war)
And popcorn is scattered across the rug
(Remnants of a catch-it-in-your-mouth contest)

It's no wonder.
There's a mouse in the office.

The man said maybe,
if we cleaned the office,
it would go away.
But this was doubtful
(Not the mouse going away - us cleaning the office)

He gave us a trap
and the trap was set.
But the trap never caught anything.

So there's still a mouse in the office,
and it's no wonder.

The mouse never ate the popcorn.
Nor did he use the ketchup.
He nibbled on the UPI stylebook.

So we left the mouse in the office.
And it's no wonder

That the mouse won the journalism award.

—Trish Troilo



Epilogues: A Shakespearean Hell

Lear sits and plays with mice the whole day long,
And Macbeth sits and wonders what went wrong.
His wife washes her hands off to the side,
And Hamlet thinks all day on suicide.
The Montagues have ended in divorce,
And Richard has been married to his horse.

—946052



—Tracy Reardon

Fog

Hungover at the train station,
I stand waiting in the fog
For twenty minutes
Or six hours—
I'm not sure.
Sunglasses on with the
Sky full of clouds,
Wearing a red hat
To match my eyes,
I consider last evening:
Up three flights and to the left.
My mind wanders into
A room dimly lit.
Sweet smells of grass burning,
Smooth tastes of Windsor and Ginger,
Candles dancing, casting a
Mysterious glow upon faceless figures.
A curious hand rests on a passive knee.
Two pass in the corridor,
Warm breath tickles the neck of the other.
Across the room, a knowing laugh promises
Satisfaction, guaranteeing it with a touch.
While lines streak a hand mirror,
Clock hands strike three a.m.
While the curious hand strokes a thigh.
The train arrives in the mist.

—Joanne Melinson

FIXTURE

It was a cool summer evening when
I realized she was no longer with me.
I ran to the kitchen hoping to find her
making dinner for me,
but there were no dishes on the table
and no aroma filled my nostrils.
I unlocked the door, hoping to find her
weeding the garden,
but by this time the flowers were withered,
their stems draped, unable to hold
the weight of the dead.
I skulked back inside.

I lay prostrate, silent for three days,
wondering how she managed to slip away unnoticed.
My eyes ached; lids like sandpaper
scraped across my field of vision.
I called out her name in every echoless night.
When she didn't return, I assumed she was dead
and began planning a monument in her memory.

Unsure of what would suit her best,
I settled on an abstraction, since no mere
representational image could possibly
embody the unfathomable psyche,
the Stygian depths of her personality;
I did not want her memory enshrouded
in simpering sentimentality
which would revolt me after much hard work
and what would eventually be an insult to her.
Besides, I no longer remembered how she looked.

A huge marble block was delivered
by three men who strained to remove it from the truck,
shrugging under the weight of it.
Like an icon, it towered above me,
dwarfing and humbling me;
its alabaster purity ached to be cut.
I pressed a hand against the cold surface.
I could feel her inside.

The next morning I rose at dawn
and went to the river and bathed.

With each hammer and chisel polished,
I chipped carefully away at the bonds.
I felt her presence emerging from the rock;
with every strike there came form and definition
until I had her standing next to me,
only more so.

I moved her outside the house
so the rest of humanity could admire her.

Soon, crowds gathered, and art critics
spoke lovingly about the stunning use
of form and space,
while some dismissed her
as frivolous and unimaginative;
all the while I wiped off the bird droppings.

Late one night she was surreptitiously
draped in a cloth and bound in a ribbon
which the mayor came and dutifully cut the next day,
making a speech and hauling her off to the park
so more people could see and touch her
and be nearer to her perfect beauty,
because art is for the people.

I lay prostrate, silent for three days
as the world touched and stared and discussed her.
As I had feared, news of her spread around the globe.

But then one day she returned to me,
entering as silently as she had gone,
finding me huddled in a corner of the house, alone.
I looked hard, trying to remember.

I kissed her goodbye
and went to sit in the park.

— Patrick Kelly



—Joanne Melinson

The Haiku Sonnet

in his search, a boy
finds the perfect girl upon
a different world

his images of
starlight coupled by the dawn
fall on deafened ear

for she only hears
iambic pentameter
coupled seven-fold

he crosses boldly
the permeable boundaries
so that she may hear. . .

He claims he's loved her all the while;
only to find she hates his style.

—Michael Ian Sheinbaum

On Losing the Human Race

Clouds of grey and barren trees surround
A misty colored valley and no sound
Can conquer the imposing quiet where
The ringing sound of silence fills the air.

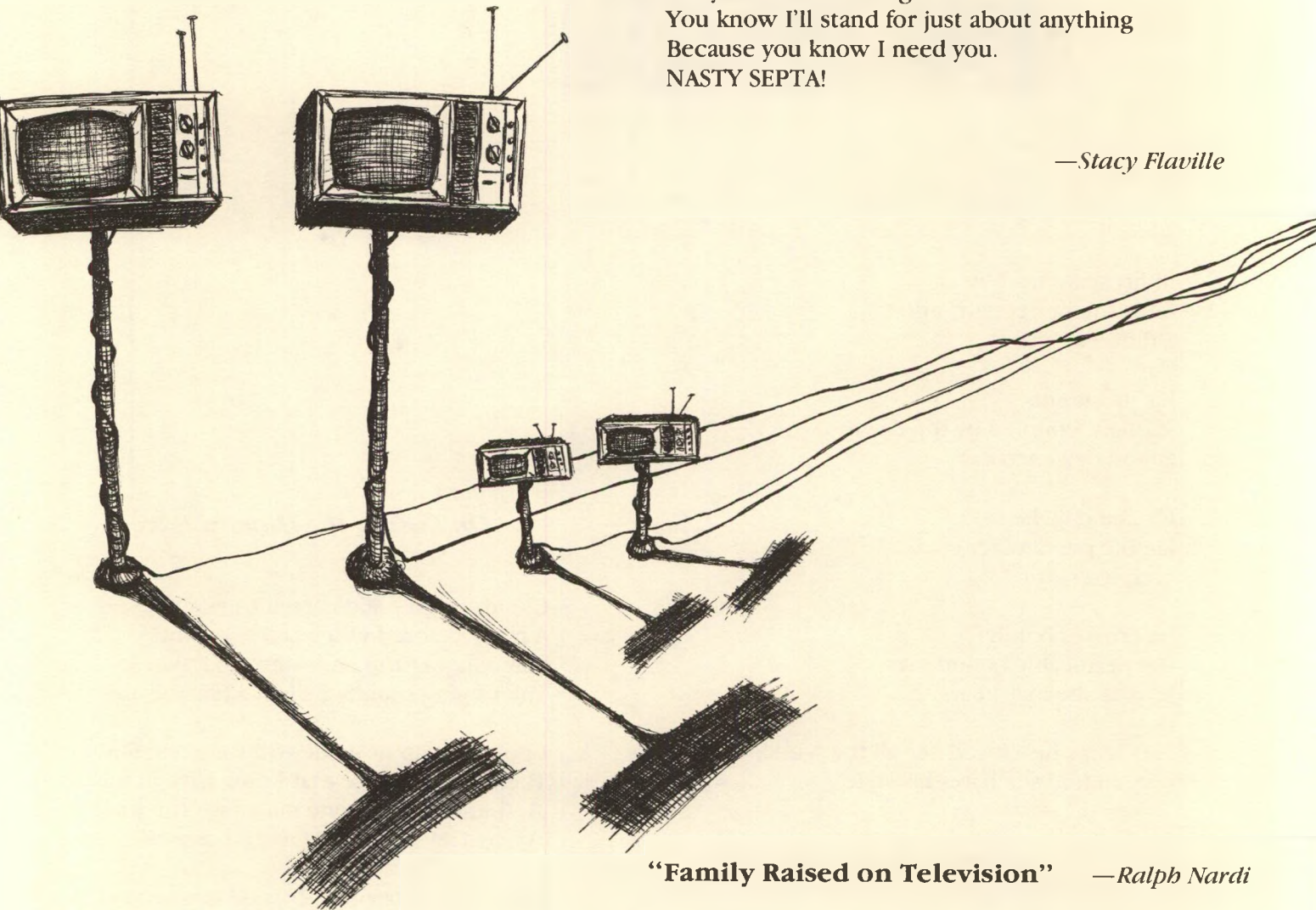
Upon no map or guide will someone find
The peaceful place that I now have in mind.
To find this valley one must take the stealth
To steal away and fade within oneself.

The world is trapped outside this secret place—
It's here I go to lose the human race.

—Valerie J. Lawfer

I wait for you everyday,
Sometimes you never even show,
And when you do, you're late.
You don't care though,
Because you know if I'm not there,
Someone else will be.
You pick me up,
You drive me crazy,
Make me nauseous,
Drop me off and make me late.
You don't care though,
Because if I'm not there,
Someone else will be.
You are sure of that.
I know that you don't need me,
But I still wait for you.
When you don't show up, I miss you...
When I don't show, you don't notice I'm not there.
You treat me terribly,
But you'll never change.
You know I'll stand for just about anything
Because you know I need you.
NASTY SEPTA!

—*Stacy Flaville*



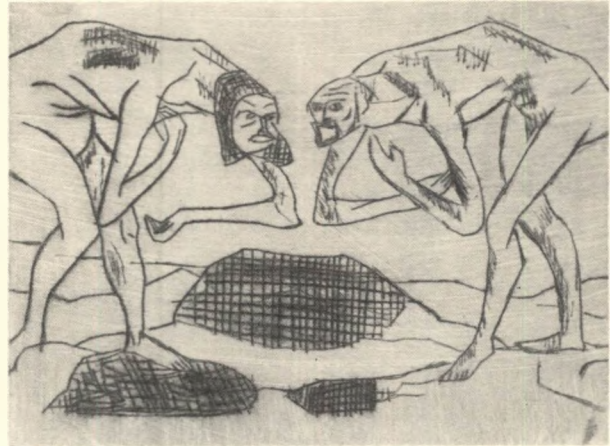
“Family Raised on Television” —*Ralph Nardi*

—Rich Tarr

AFTER READING THE BELL JAR

Sylvia, behind the distorted glass,
a lens so thin, so sealed tight,
the air suffers unmercifully.
The pressure unvented
pushes against your head
like a colossal bubble
shocking all emotion,
fizzling every nerve cell
until it kills, kills
the pollution in your brain.
And after the pain is soothed,
soothed as a lullaby,
you sink into sleep
innocent and sweet
as a dead baby.

We are God, Sylvia.
You frail, pale, smarty lady
Housing some lunatic monster.
You scatter-brain,
floating in some bad dream.
Grab her, straight jacket her.
We dissect you, label,
and file you in a jar,
and discuss you forever,
keeping you alive
like a heart lying on a table
waiting to be transplanted—
no body, no mind—
tha-thump, tha-thump
against the cold air,
beating for no one.



Sometimes, Sylvia, I feel we could be sisters —
Siamese twins, joined at the eye,
sharing the same twisted vision.
I have felt sentenced, too,
opening the jacket of your book
only to slam it shut,
to hear it crack
displaying you still in separate pieces
puzzling and preserved
as an ancient mosaic.
And your immortal Siren's Song,
more frightening than Auschwitz,
loony bins, and parental power,
Rises up and screams.
You are Lady Lazarus
pointing your finger at
Mother and Daddy and Doctor,
and God, and even me,
We, who stand as guilty
as a gift of roses
arriving blood-red, thirsty,
wirey, and thorned
to place at the head of the grave
of some loved one
we inexcusably
buried alive.

—Eileen Nichols

Peek-A-Boo

My nerves pulsate with pain,
up and down my arms,
amorphous in their births.
Crawling about for truths
and holding my brain,
the vital jellied-substance
in the hollows of my canopic, calcium urn;
teeth clenched in supressed anguish.

Not knowing I exist, she left the room.
Her bare ankles being the flesh (perpetual)
I remember last.

—Eugene J. Halus, Jr.

EASTER, A.D. 33

When in April bitter showers fall
And pierce the swollen lips like wine-soaked rags,
A titan stigmatized upon the crags
Feeds pious vultures with his scarlet gall
And wasted flesh; he has no more to give.
The spectacle attracts such buzzing hordes
That clot the Roman wounds and suck those gourds,
Sweet fodder for the lambs who deign to live
On other's labors. Come balmy night
With mocking stars, yet he suffers to heal.
Replete with gifts another chose to steal
Or bestow, bloated mortals ease their plight.
A ceremony gods and men conspire
To purge the worldly soul with sacred fire.

—William E. Mahoney Jr.

Bart always took the window seat when riding the bus. From the window, he could keep his mind occupied by counting the number of roaming weirdos and derelicts he saw on the street. Punked-out teenagers were his favorite to spot. The winos and bag ladies were so commonplace, however, that, unless one happened to appear extraordinarily pathetic and amusing, he never counted them. Occasionally he would spy a street-corner preacher who was probably babbling some gibberish about redemption and a new life but Bart was never sure whether to count just the preacher or also include any passers-by who stopped to listen. The tally varied according to mood: if Bart was in a good mood that day, his rating criteria would be more generous; if he was in a bad mood, however, his score of human oddities would be high. This was one of his worst days and he was counting his victims like a priest keeping track of others' sins.

It was the best way he knew of keeping himself amused



—Susan Straub

and his mind off his own worries. The peculiar thing was that he wasn't sure exactly what his worries were—he had enough money, a job, a woman. The vacancy which pestered him was in his consciousness, nothing concrete which he could put his finger on. Actually, he rather envied those objects of his cynical past-time, seeing them as having problems which helpfully shouted at and strangled their victim into submission. Better to be in hell and know it, he thought, than to wander aimlessly until you withered away into nothingness in limbo. So it wasn't as if he rode the bus solely for the opportunity of checking out weirdos—it was game, therapy, judgment all in one.

Usually, the circumstances of these fallen humans was a matter of indifference to him. But this day was different. This day, Bart began wondering about how these people fell into such cruel straits. Where did it begin? What started the landslide? He saw where it led: this human trash heap was an aspect of society most people would much rather sweep under the rug than deal with properly. In fact, the community dealt more properly with its household garbage than with this living waste. These were the souls society had tossed away—they had no incentive for taking, giving, or living life. Theirs was the most futile state of lost hope, and it was as if, in a way, Bart was looking to them for guidance.

So this day his little game did not keep him amused. Instead, he felt pangs of depression and a sense of isolation from any good there might have been left in the world. He had always thought that on the bus he was immune from the sickness spreading on the street but then he realized that his observer status was no protection from becoming a part of that world. He was joining the landslide, he was losing hope in the power of goodness.

Bart had just finished counting his seventh weirdo on the same block—a muscular man, leather-capped and tattooed, carrying a purse—when the bus stopped to pick up and let off. A young woman and her child stepped up from the street onto the bus. The woman handed the driver the fare and claimed the two seats across the aisle from Bart. Once again, the bus began to move.

The toddler was a lively little girl with wavy blonde hair and a face that radiated innocence. Bart found it pleasant to be in the presence of someone who still believed in Santa Claus. He looked over at the little girl and gave her a smile and a wink. It was ironic, he thought, that despite

his dour state of mind something so simple could manage to lift his heart and the corners of his mouth. He was terrifically fond of children and good with most. Kids were the most clever and exciting people he knew, and he greatly admired child-like qualities in adults. A friend of his was an architect who had designed many impressive structures but, as Bart discovered one day, couldn't build a sand castle. Tragic, Bart thought—it was hard for Bart to like a person who couldn't build a sand castle.

Bart was loosed from these thoughts to find the little girl smiling at him. He looked back, also smiling. She abruptly covered her face with her two tiny hands. Slowly, her fingers started to spread apart, revealing her youthfully fresh pair of blue eyes. She saw Bart still looking at her and urgently hid her eyes again as if sheltering herself against Bart's gaze. Bart looked away. Out of the corner of his eye he saw her hands begin to lower until they rested on her chin in a prayer-like fashion, further complementing her cherubic face; then, he quickly turned his head to look at her, a broad grin conquering his normally tight-lipped mouth. The little girl squealed and immediately covered her face again.

In his playmate Bart realized redemption. Becoming a part of this other's world meant escape from that world of his in which complacency was elusive, if it existed at all. He had looked hard at his world—and long. So long, in fact, that he had become too familiar with it, his expectations for it dwindled as they were gradually achieved, and this world of his decayed. He was certainly still looking at the world, but now somebody had looked back. This act brought Bart into another's world, and he was emancipated in it.

The two of them carried on for quite a while, neither tiring of the game. In the end, as Bart felt the bus coming to a halt and the mother took the little girl's hand to walk to the door, the little girl generously raised her uncovered face high so that Bart might admire her energetically glowing youth. The game was over, she was leaving. Before stepping down to exit the bus, she looked back at him and waved. "Bye-bye," was all she said. She descended into the street. Bart waved back, thinking how much he would like to go with her. He shifted his feet and found a lump of chewing gum had stuck itself to the sole of his sneaker. He looked at her through the window as the bus pulled away.

—Michael Clinton



In love with
Inspiration, and sipping hot tea,
Young Writer sets to words
the melodies in her mind.

In love with
Inspiration, and sipping hot tea,
Young Writer wants all to be
Done. Automatically.

In love with
Tea, inspiration slipping,
Her perception of the world is tipping.
And, Young Writer, time is passing.

In love with inspiration, and sipping hot tea,
Young Writer turns and says to me
And if you could do any better—
Why doncha?



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